EUA
European University Association

European Commission's "Green Paper" on "The European Research Area: New Perspectives"

Viewpoint from the European University Association (EUA)

EUA welcomes the fact that the re-launching of the debate on the future of the ERA has further highlighted the urgent need to re-distribute the European Union budget to give more support to the role of higher education institutions in promoting research and technological development to meet successfully the revised Lisbon Objectives. The strengthening of the European Research Area through the development of new instruments that will enable Europe's universities to play a fuller role should be continued with added vigour.

Europe's universities are a central pillar in building the ERA through their main responsibility for providing the supply of trained researchers and through their core missions in fundamental and collaborative research. In performing these major functions Europe's universities play a crucial underpinning role in enhancing the economic competitiveness of Europe.

Universities are also the unique environments in which interdisciplinary skills are being developed to tackle the complex challenges facing human, social and economic development in the 21st century. In addition, the European "specificity" of its strong tradition in the social and human sciences rooted in its diverse cultural heritage offers Europe's strength in the medium to long term to develop new interdisciplinary scientific fields combining natural and human sciences as a competitive advantage in the global economy. Innovation will not be achieved unless its cultural and social aspects are thoroughly understood and addressed.

EUA expects, therefore, that Europe's universities as key stakeholders in the European Research Area will be brought fully into the process of putting into practice the proposed "Action lines" that will result from the current debate.

The EUA "Lisbon Declaration" as a Starting Point

EUA's response draws upon the outcomes of the 4th EUA Convention of Higher Education Institutions which, fittingly, was held in Lisbon, Portugal, on 29-31 March 2007. The "EUA Lisbon Declaration" provides the policy agenda for the work of the EUA with its membership (currently 780 universities in 46 countries and national rectors' conferences in 34 countries across Europe) in the coming years. It was presented to the "Bologna Process" Meeting of Ministers of Education in London on 17-18 May 2007 and places key emphasis on the need for coherent policy linkage between the building of the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area in responding to the challenges posed to Europe in a globalised world[1].

As in the case with EUA responses to other major European Commission policy communications, the EUA has prepared this statement as an "overview response" which also takes account of the viewpoints offered by National Rectors Conferences and university networks during the ERA Green Paper consultation process. In doing so, this statement concentrates on the central issues raised in the "six main dimensions of the ERA" presented in the Green Paper rather than every specific question posed under each dimension (except in the case of "Strengthening Research Institutions" where the needs of universities as research institutions are addressed).

[1] Lisbon Declaration. Europe's Universities beyond 2010 : Diversity with a common purpose (EUA, May 2007)

Continuity of EUA viewpoint with respect to its previous positions on ERA

At a previous point of the European Commission's reflection on progress in the development of the ERA in 2004, the EUA issued its response to the European Commission Communication on "Science and Technology, the key to Europe's Future – Guidelines for Future European Union Policy to support Research"[2] The EUA position sought to introduce and establish the views of universities as key stakeholders in the debate on the future development of the ERA and the then planned 7th Research Framework Programme. The EUA position on the 2004 Communication has been cited by Mr. Jerzy Buzek, MEP and European Parliament Rapporteur on the 7th Research Framework Programme, as a key document in highlighting the importance and contribution of universities as institutions in building the European Research Area.

The EUA November 2004 position emphasized that the effective building of the European Research Area required the strengthening of the role of universities. It stated that:-

> "Universities are strategically placed at the interplay of RTD, educational and regional development policies at both national and European levels. Through their multiple mission that encompasses teaching, research training, basic research, knowledge transfer to foster university-industry partnerships and public policy development, and not least, informing a wider "knowledge society", they have, as institutions, a unique role to play in bridging the policy framework "gap" between actions in relation to education, training, research and regional development in the Enlarged Union. Further research policy and practice should take account of this unique role and thus of the potential added value brought by the universities to the European research effort in a mid to long term perspective".

These above perspectives remain highly relevant in addressing the six main dimensions of the "European Research Area Vision" in the Green Paper.

I. General Comments on the ERA "Green Paper"

Three years on from the above EUA statement on the strategic importance of universities as institutions in building the European Research Area, EUA would wish to make the following general comments on how much the role of Europe's universities has become integrated within the main elements of the European Commission's "European Research Area Vision".

(i) Key Stakeholders

The Green Paper now clearly places universities as key stakeholders in achieving its vision of "Making ERA a Reality". This new recognition and emphasis is welcomed by EUA as a most positive development in the debate on the future of the ERA.

(ii) Autonomy

Another important positive development to be welcomed in the Green Paper is the acknowledgement of the need for university autonomy in the management of its research mission. As stated in the EUA Lisbon Declaration, the principles of university autonomy must accommodate diverse institutional missions and include academic autonomy (curricula and research), financial autonomy (lump sum budgeting), organizational autonomy (the structure of the university) and staffing autonomy (responsibility for recruitment, salaries and promotion). The EUA believes that strong universities with a greater autonomy and accountability rather than universities over-regulated by national and European governmental agencies will be able to play their full part in responding to a changing society and its demands and in contributing to the revised Lisbon Agenda on Growth and Jobs

[2] EUA Response to the EC Communication : Science and technology, the key to Europe's future – Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research (EUA, November 2004)

(iii) Historical Under-Financing

In general, the central problem of the historical under-financing of universities in Europe compared to its main global competitors is understated. On this point, a clear connection is highly desirable in the ERA Green Paper to the EC Communication "Modernisation Agenda for Universities"[3] stated need to reduce the funding gap by 2015 through aiming to devote at least 2% of GDP (including both public and private funding) to higher education and research. Without this increased level of investment the structural actions proposed in the Green Paper are unlikely to achieve the stated ERA goals.

(iv) Public Funding of Research on a Competitive basis

The Green Paper does not place sufficient priority on the importance of fundamental research and the need to strengthen the role and resources available to the newly-established European Research Council to enhance university excellence in Europe and enable universities to recruit and retain well-qualified researchers. University-based research also requires well-funded competitive funding schemes at the national level to maintain and strengthen research capacity in established and new fields.

(v) Full cost funding of research

It is noted that there remains a significant lack of any reference in the "Green Paper" to the need to move towards full cost funding of research supported by external funding agencies as an essential condition to underpin the sustainability of universities' research missions. However, the EU 7th Research Framework Programme with its new eligible research costs model is a step forward in the move towards full-cost support for research and also a major "driver" in the development of university finance and accounting systems to operate on full-cost accounting.

(vi) ERA and EHEA policy linkage

There is an urgent need for a greater linkage and dialogue in the policy development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA), particularly in relation to achieving a sufficient flow and supply of competent researchers. EUA views it to be essential to ensure maximum synergies between the "Bologna Process" in building the EHEA and the parallel development of the ERA – "Viewed together, EU support through the Research Framework Programme and the wider Bologna process represent a major investment in Europe's education, training and research sector to meet the Lisbon and Barcelona goals, notably in combating the present lack of qualified manpower"[4].

(vii) Doctoral Reform and Research Career Development

The Green Paper debate needs to connect more with higher education reform underway in the Bologna process, particularly given its extension to the 3rd Cycle (doctoral training reform and the further development of doctoral programmes for academic and non-academic careers). 3rd Cycle reforms are changing considerably the overall environment in which research training and research careers are being developed. Universities involved with the Bologna reform process are working to improve the conditions of doctoral candidates and their prospective career development which contribute in practical ways to addressing the core issues raised in the EC policy initiative of the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers.

[3] EC Communication "Delivering on the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation" (EC Document, May 2006)
[4] EUA Response to the EC Communication : Science and technology, the key to Europe's future – Guidelines for future European Union policy to support research (EUA, November 2004)

(viii) Research, Knowledge Transfer and Innovation

Universities recognize the need to create research environments where talented researchers are able to balance their interests to pursue fundamental research and explore successful collaborations with external partners in both public and private sectors. Holistic approaches are required to achieve such environments whose success build upon integrated strategies linking universities' activities in education, research and innovation (the "knowledge triangle"). Universities are making increasingly major contributions through investment in knowledge transfer capacity (both professional expertise, patents and spin-offs), the development of collaborative postgraduate programmes, the production of scientific publications in applied fields, the promotion of entrepreneurial culture and the development of higher education degrees to provide highly skilled professionals for new labour market needs

(ix) Research and Teaching

Finally, and importantly as a general comment, the Green Paper does not give sufficient recognition to the role of research in fostering high level teaching at all levels in higher education institutions. Research is a strong force in driving quality issues in education and this should be acknowledged and promoted in the debate on the future development of the ERA.

II. Specific Comments on the "Six Main Dimensions" of the European Research Area

Comments on all the dimensions addressed in the Green Paper are put forward below with more attention devoted to the dimension of "Strengthening Research Institutions" where the needs of universities as research institutions are addressed.

(i) Realising a Single Labour Market for Researchers

EUA believes that meeting this objective will require stronger linkage between ERA and EHEA policy development. EUA has focused its efforts so far on the early stage of research career development at the doctoral level. The attractiveness of a research career whether in academic or non-academic labour markets is largely determined at the doctoral stage. Hence the improvement of conditions both in terms of the research environment (equipment, supervision, collaboration with external partners, mobility opportunities to strengthen research expertise and career development) and financial and living conditions (grant support, research/teaching assistant status, taxation, social security and pension provision and contributions) at the doctoral level should be a *prima facie* concern. EUA argues that Europe needs a clearer vision for doctoral research training on these key issues that requires an urgent policy dialogue between European institutions and the national government ministries, national research councils, private foundations and industry and business enterprises which are the sources of the diverse funding of doctoral research across European countries[5].

Such a dialogue should be the starting point for further consideration of policy options addressing differing opportunities and barriers facing researchers across the whole span of their career paths including the need to strive for a more balanced age structure of the research community (to combat Europe's serious problem of an ageing researcher population) and gender representation (to reflect the present imbalance and the increasing higher proportion of women entering higher education in Europe). The framework of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) would offer the best opportunity to make progress on these issues and the future implementation of the principles of the "European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for their Recruitment" in the differing national and regional legislative contexts.

Strengthening the dialogue between universities/public research institutions and industry/business enterprises is essential also to "change the mindset" on both sides concerning requirements for employability and intersectoral mobility in research careers in both academic and non academic

[5] Doctoral Programmes in Europe's Universities : Achievements and Challenges (EUA, September 2007

sectors. On employability, while an original research contribution lies at the heart of doctoral research, the continuing development of "transferable skills" components of doctoral research are proving essential in enhancing the employability of doctorate holders. Universities need to ensure also the "sustainability" of their research capacity in areas of strength and potential collaboration with enterprises. Hence medium to long-term, not short-term "one-off", research collaboration is required in order to achieve greater creative synergy between education, research and innovation in which intersectoral mobility will be able to develop and flourish.

EUA has played an active role on the part of its university membership in the recent series of EU Presidency Conferences that have been held over the past two years on the Researchers Charter, Researcher Careers and Labour Markets, Crossing the Borders of Academia and Industry (held respectively in London, Vienna and Stuttgart) and the various related EU "expert groups" meetings. EUA believes that such EU-level activities should be continued as they were crucial in fostering knowledge exchange and awareness-raising on these central issues.

Finally, the Green Paper should give greater recognition to the importance of the Marie Curie Actions which in their various new forms under the 7th Research Framework Programme have been developed with employability and intersectoral mobility needs in mind. However, there remains a strong need for the re-introduction within the Marie Curie Actions of a postdoctoral fellowship scheme which in previous FPs had been a valuable instrument in both research career development and in fostering exchange and mobility across Europe's universities. In building the European Research Area as an attractive global region for researchers the Marie Curie Actions need to be continued with increased funding in parallel development with other open competitive funding schemes such as the European Research Council.

(ii) Developing world-class research infrastructures

EUA has welcomed the creation of the European Strategic Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI) and the results of its work through the "European roadmaps" identifying priorities for large scale research infrastructure investment across several scientific fields. University-based researchers should continue to benefit from the access granted to large scale infrastructures through European Community actions. Also, the challenge must be met of achieving the maximum available use of research infrastructure for education and training purposes.

EUA considers that the current European debate on developing new large-scale research infrastructures and their upgrading is not sufficiently linked to other components in building the ERA such as research career development and sustainability of university-based research and infrastructure. Discussions have tended to focus on the physical research infrastructure themselves (mainly new and large scale machines/equipment) with much less emphasis on the necessary related human resource needs and the implications of digital technology for future development and use of research infrastructures and their research data/resources.

Europe's universities offer many types of research infrastructures (large and small, including national digital repositories) in all fields; their collective capacities and needs should be assessed within the overall framework of developing a European strategy for research infrastructures. EU research funding schemes should include provision for the use and maintenance of university research infrastructure which is historically under-funded in many parts of Europe.

In this respect EUA believes that the policy linkage between FP7 research funding and the European Union Structural Fund investment (re-orientated to the Lisbon Agenda on "Growth and Jobs") holds crucial importance for research infrastructure renewal and upgrading in Europe's universities, particularly in EU new member states.

(iii) Strengthening Research Institutions

EUA wishes to give specific attention to the issues raised in this section of the Green Paper which address universities as research institutions. The underlying premise in this section of the Green paper is that strengthening research institutions is the key to stimulating business RTD investment in

Europe. The Green Paper argues that their potential is not fully realized due to significant dispersion of resources and activities, insufficient links with business and society, and rigidities in their functioning.

The Green Paper envisages five main means of tackling these challenges facing research institutions: (i) greater autonomy, professionalism in the management of research and transparent standards of accountability; (ii) linking public funding to output and performance; (iii) stimulating innovative public-private partnerships in research; (iv) creating virtual research communities using information and technology technologies (ICTs); and (v) establishing virtual centres of excellence through pooling research resources and research management capabilities.

EUA's response follows the sequence and logic of the questions posed in this section of the Green Paper.

"How can the resources of European research institutions be strengthened in the most cost-effective manner, in order to enable them to achieve excellence and compete on a world scale?"

As mentioned above in the section on EUA General Comments, the Green Paper does not place sufficient priority on the importance of fundamental research and the need to strengthen the role and resources available to the newly-established European Research Council as the most cost-effective manner to achieve university excellence in Europe and enable universities to recruit and retain well-qualified researchers. In addition, public-private partnerships will be stimulated further by such greater investment in the ERC because industry/enterprises will seek more to invest in excellent university-based laboratories and researchers as the "open innovation" model of industry/business research collaboration with public research organisations becomes more firmly established.

However, excellent universities can only exist and function effectively within the broader, complementary framework of the research capacity existing in a diversified higher education system. Concentration of funds for excellent institutions should not be at the expense of successful higher education institutions performing the essential and indispensable functions of the production and distribution of knowledge for economic and social development, and necessary skills for labour markets in their regions and beyond.

Concentration and diversification must also be sensitive to the need for openness to new entrants achieving quality results in their fields (particularly early stage researchers). Furthermore, from the perspectives of smaller European countries there remains a need to maintain an advanced knowledge base.

"How can research actors be better encouraged to create world-class virtual centres of excellence, such as in the context of the proposed European Institute of Technology, the FP7 "networks of excellence" and national and regional initiatives, and to share structures that pool the research management capabilities of several institutions?"

Imbalances in the 27 Member States' RTD systems in terms of university autonomy, funding structures and procedures will persist as a major problem also inhibiting the development of "virtual centres of excellence" which could, all things being equal, be the best way forward. A concept of European coordinated funding would be required which would not depend on research actors applying for funds independently at national and regional levels. Otherwise there was the clear risk of limiting research actors in "virtual centres of excellence" to those countries and/or scientific fields where financial support schemes were available.

A better approach would be to study "success stories" in building existing "Networks of Excellence" under FP6 and consider in more depth the support mechanisms and partnerships required to bring about their sustainability and their openness to new entrants. In addition, existing "good practices" in European centres of excellence such as the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) would merit careful analysis as models for future development – which strike a balance between both their

dependence on member states for financial support and their relative independence from member states in the conduct of their research priorities and research management.

The pooling and sharing of research management and accounting capabilities, good practices and experiences needs to be addressed through a new instrument that builds upon the model of the ERA-NET and OMC-NET schemes but where universities as institutions are the consortia leaders and partners. Such a scheme would enable groups of universities with shared strategic research missions and profiles to intensify their collaboration across national and regional borders, and at the level of research management, finance and accounting provide strategic support for career development and mobility of university research managers and finance personnel which are missing elements in building the ERA.

"Is there a need for a European regulatory initiative to facilitate the creation of public-private partnerships?"

There is no real need for a regulatory approach because successful public-private partnerships are mainly developed in a "bottom-up" way on a voluntary basis in varying local, regional, national and European contexts. The EUA, together with its partners, EIRMA, EARTO and ProTonEurope, have developed a set of guidelines entitled "Responsible Partnering" for research collaboration between public and private partners based on such existing good practices[6]. The "Responsible Partnering Guidelines" cover ten core areas that are crucial to successful collaboration concerning aligning interests, professional training and skills, consortia-building, intellectual property rights and patents and building lasting relationships in collaborative research.

The EUA believes that the "Responsible Partnering" guidelines could be valuably embedded and developed further as a voluntary code of practice in new policy instruments designed to foster the creation of public-private partnerships such as the European Institute of Technology (EIT). The Responsible Partnering Guidelines have been recognised as a valuable European initiative in the recent European Commission Communication on "Improving Knowledge Transfer between Research Institutions and Industry across Europe: Embracing Open Innovation"[7] and strongly recommended for further development and implementation by the recent "Aho Report" on "Creating an Innovative Europe"[8]

"How can the EU and Member States best stimulate the emergence of European and global virtual research communities, exploiting fully the potential of computing, information and communication infrastructures?"

Virtual research communities are best developed by the researchers rather than "top down" by governmental bodies. In addition, of course, computing, information and communication infrastructures involve expenditure and hence the question of establishing priorities vis-a-vis other public investments in research emerges as the primary question. Certainly the full potential of ICT technologies has not yet been realized and needs, for example, to be developed to enhance the virtual usage of common research infrastructures hosting scientific data bases in Europe and coordination efforts in this respect should be explored.

It can be argued that the full potential of ICT technologies can best stimulated to enhance greater "open access" to scientific results arising from publicly funded research in order to diffuse them and make them available to the research communities, the public and interested parties and stakeholders within EU, the developing world and world-wide. EU and Member States need, therefore, to take the

[6] Responsible Partnering – Joining Forces in a World of Open Innovation. A guide to better practices for collaborative research and knowledge transfer between science and industry (EUA, EIRMA, EARTO and ProTonEurope, 2005)
[7] EC Communication "Improving Knowledge Transfer between research institutions and industry across Europe: Embracing open Innovation" (EC document, April 2007)
[8] Creating an Innovative Europe. Report of the Independent Expert Group on R & D and Innovation. (January 2006)

initiative in developing the policy framework for open access to research results in consultation with the various stakeholders.

"Should action be taken to develop: (i) principles for autonomy and for the management of research by research institutions, notably universities; (ii) shared criteria for the funding and assessment of research institutions, notably universities, giving stronger weight to linkages beyond academia, as well as to output and performance factors?"

Setting at the European level shared principles and criteria for the autonomy, funding and assessment of research institutions is generally not regarded as being easily achievable or desirable because of the diversity of university missions across Europe. While it has its disadvantages, the Open Method of Coordination remains the optimal means for making progress in these areas – which would require involvement of government ministries beyond the confines of research, technology and higher education, and the participation of universities on an equal footing as key stakeholders.

(iv) Sharing Knowledge

As mentioned in comments above on the dimension of "strengthening research institutions", the EUA believes that the "Responsible Partnering" guidelines provide an existing proven basis for a European Framework for knowledge sharing between research institutions and industry/enterprises based upon identified good practice and models that reflect various national initiatives and offer flexible solutions for effective knowledge sharing. The four partners from the university sector (EUA), business (EIRMA), research and technology organizations (EARTO) and knowledge transfer offices (ProTonEurope) who have developed the "Responsible Partnering" guidelines will be reviewing progress in effective research collaboration (through case studies) at a specific event organized under the EU Portuguese Presidency to be held at the Gulbenkian Foundation in Lisbon on 3-4 December 2007. Within the context of this event the EU German Presidency's proposal to develop an Intellectual Property Charter will be reviewed from the viewpoints of the respective stakeholders (on such key issues as the grace period, joint ownership regimes and importantly the need to rationalize administrative procedures, language translation etc).

On the issue of Open Access, the EUA has established in 2007 an Open Access Working Group comprised of university-based experts in various research fields, and library resources and ICT development in relation to digital archiving and national repositories etc. The Working Group has presented input to the debates at the 2007 EU Conference on Scientific Publishing in the Digital Age (February 2007) on the need to find workable solutions to achieving more rapid dissemination of data and peer-reviewed publications arising from publicly-funded research. EUA believes that EU level policies and practices should move consistently in this direction and support new initiatives announced by the European Research Council and other funding agencies such as the Wellcome Trust.

(v) Optimising Research programmes and priorities

The ERA-NET scheme has proven to be valuable in linking national and regional research programmes and their research teams and in some cases has led to the development of jointly-funded international research programmes. EUA believes that the success of such ERA-NET scheme rests on the voluntary, open framework in which cooperation and coordination has taken place. Universities wish to see a range of competing research funding schemes at the regional, national and European level and not an over-coordinated system in terms of funding and priority setting which may, in fact, limit new opportunities and inhibit innovative research and new entrants.

In addition, the transparency of new funding instruments involving industry/enterprises, governments, and universities and other public research organizations, such as the Joint Technology Initiatives and the European Institute of Technology, will be important in terms of the setting of research agendas and the openness of opportunities to bid for participation on a competitive basis.

The new European Research Council is breaking new ground with peer review, quality assurance and project evaluation and the EUA, together with other interested stakeholders, is supportive of their

efforts and will continue to provide feedback and input from the university sector. The success of the ERC in these areas may provide useful benchmarks for future common principles at the European level but, for the present, the Open Method of Coordination of shared knowledge and experience on a voluntary basis would be more effective than attempts at top-down coordination by the European Commission

(vi) Opening to the world: International cooperation in Science and technology

Europe's universities have traditionally fostered international cooperation reflecting their cultural and historical development, trading relations etc. The role of European Research Area policies in the future development of international cooperation in science and technology should work to build upon and link these developments with encouragement of more joint approaches. EU instruments should primarily help to facilitate common approaches in areas of mutual interest and potential benefit for international scientific cooperation between European universities and those in both the industrialized economies and developing countries in tackling global sustainable development challenges (e.g. through joint doctoral programmes and exchanges such as the new Erasmus Mundus proposals, to shared use of research infrastructures and equipment and the development of projects with multinational research teams).

III. Moving on from the ERA Debate: Requirements and Actions

EUA expects that Europe's universities as key stakeholders in the European Research Area will be brought fully into the process of putting into practice the proposed "Action lines" that will result from the current debate re-launching the European Research Area. Drawing upon its comments above, EUA has identified six core requirements that will need to underpin policy actions to achieve European added value in future instruments and initiatives in the successful development of the ERA.

1. A Competitive ERA requires urgently an increased budget commitment from EU Member States

The EUA believes that an increased budget commitment to the European Research Council is a cornerstone in creating a "European quality culture" in research that will enable Europe's universities to best play their role in achieving a globally competitive ERA. A highly visible, well-funded and independent ERC offering Europe's universities competitive funding schemes with high standards of peer review, quality assurance and evaluation is an essential priority and the EUA is committed to playing its part in supporting and working with the ERC Scientific Council to achieve these goals. However, ERC will only succeed if there is a dual-fold approach on the part of EU Members States through greater priority given to investment in science and technology at the national and regional levels, particularly to remedy the historical under-financing of universities.

2. Greater University Autonomy/ Less Over-Regulation

The EUA hopes that the debate on the future development of the European Research Area will be focused on creating effective instruments and mechanisms to help enhance European research competitiveness on the basis of open and full dialogue with university stakeholders rather than to move in the direction of government-led over-regulation. The EUA believes that strong universities with a greater autonomy and accountability rather than universities over-regulated by national and European governmental agencies will be able to play their full part in contributing to the revised Lisbon Agenda on Growth and Jobs.

While recognising, of course, the importance and necessity of regulatory requirements for high standards of management and accountability, there should be resistance towards a tendency for over-regulation linked to the continued historical under-financing of Europe's universities (i.e. as a mechanism to re-distribute resources that are too scarce in comparison with our global competitors). Greater autonomy will provide universities with the necessary flexibility to respond to the challenges of

diversifying their research and their funding missions in order to play more effectively their role in addressing society's needs and advancing Europe's competitiveness in the global economy.

3. Innovative use of the Open Method of Coordination – Involving Universities

Of the policy instruments currently available in the European Union context, the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), offers the best prospects for making progress in (i) tackling the serious challenge of rectifying the under-financing of higher education in Europe compared to its global competitors, and (ii) advancing the operational definitions and practices for achieving effective university autonomy while paying respect to the differing conditions at play in the various member states. However, learning from the success of the Bologna process, universities should be represented and involved on an equal footing in such OMC initiatives as key stakeholders thus allowing consensus to be reached among all parties on action required.

4. Recognition of Universities as important stakeholders in EU Structural Funds Investment

Universities should be involved more directly as key stakeholders in the shaping of the development of the synergy between EU R & D actions and the use of the EU Structural Funds for science and technological development to meet the revised Lisbon Agenda on "Growth and Jobs". In particular, such synergy holds crucial importance for research infrastructure renewal and upgrading in Europe's universities, particularly in EU new member states.

5. Increased Involvement of University Leaders in EU Science Advisory Bodies

In reforming its independent science advisory bodies such as the European Research Advisory Board (EURAB), the European Commission should rectify the serious under-representation of university leaders in such bodies given that Europe's universities are key stakeholders in building a competitive Europe in science, technology and innovation

6. More coherent linkage between future EU policy development concerning universities

As a final, but most important point, the ERA Green Paper provides a timely opportunity for the European Commission to consider and develop a more coherent strategic approach in the implementation of its policies that concern Europe's Universities. This is crucial in relation to research, education and culture, where it is urgent to link the development of the ERA and EHEA in order to achieve the success of both, but also in the policy domains of enterprise, regional development and external relations. At present, Europe's universities are involved with respective EU Commission's services covering all these fields (and others) but without sufficient coordination to achieve the maximum European added-value for all parties concerned.

21st September 2007